



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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IN REPLY REFER TO
6780
CA 660

Expiration of Administrative Closure Decisions Coachella Valley Plan Amendment to the California Desert Conservation Area Plan

On the following dates decisions were made administratively closing certain areas to off highway vehicle (OHV) use on a temporary basis pending approval of the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Coachella Valley plan amendment to the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan. The ROD for the Coachella Valley Plan was signed on December 27, 2002.

Dunn Road
Windy Point

August 3, 2000
December 19, 2000

In litigation brought in Federal District Court, plaintiffs alleged that BLM was in violation of Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act by failing to enter into formal consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service on the effects of the adoption of the CDCA plan. See *Center for Biological Diversity v. BLM*, CV-00-927 (WHA) (N.D.Cal). Plaintiffs and BLM agreed to settle the case. A series of settlement agreements, collectively referred to as a Consent Decree, were entered. As reflected in the Consent Decree, BLM agreed to undertake certain actions on a temporary basis pending signing of a decision document for each applicable plan amendment. One of the provisions of the Consent Decree established a date by which route designation in the Coachella Valley plan area would be accomplished. See Stipulation and Proposed Order to Amend Consent Decree, para. 5, March 28, 2002. In December 2002, the Record of Decision for the Coachella Valley plan was signed. As explained in the accompanying Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Draft CDCA Plan Amendment, the BLM was required to designate as open, closed, or limited off-highway vehicle routes on public lands pursuant to federal regulation, BLM policy and the CDCA plan of 1980, as amended. The environmental impacts of designating routes for OHV use were fully analyzed in the Coachella Valley Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement.

In general, the expressed rationale for the above administrative closures was that until the Bureau of Land Management could complete the Coachella Valley plan amendment, complete consultation, and issue a ROD, the temporary closures would remain in place to provide

additional short term protection for listed species. The Windy Point closure was implemented under 43 CFR 8341.2(a). Re-opening requires a determination by the Authorized Officer that the adverse effects justifying the closure have been eliminated and measures implemented to prevent recurrence. The lack of Endangered Species Act consultation on the CDCA plan and its Coachella Valley plan area, and the lack of a plan amendment document for the Coachella Valley plan area (the expressed justifications for the closures), were satisfied with the completion of consultation and the signing of the Coachella Valley plan ROD in December 2002. With signing of the Coachella Valley plan ROD, the administrative closures became inconsistent with the CDCA Plan, obsolete, and, since the underlying justifications for the closures have been satisfied, the closures have expired by their very terms. To the extent that a specific written determination is required, this memorandum documents that determination.

My determination is based upon my review and understanding of the circumstances leading to the administrative closures, the litigation in CBD v. BLM, C-00-927 (WHA), the ensuing Consent Decree in that case, and various threatened and applied enforcement and other actions therein, the Environmental Impact Statement for the Coachella Valley plan amendment to the CDCA Plan, and the administrative records for the closure and amendment processes.

Should the CDCA Plan as amended by the Coachella Valley plan amendment be further amended, additional consultation and environmental review will be conducted as necessary. Since the Coachella Valley plan amendment is anticipated to be in effect for the next 10-15 years, and since additional consultation and further environmental review will be accomplished as necessary, measures have been taken, are in place, and will be taken as necessary to prevent the recurrence of a lack of consultation, and the lack of a CDCA plan amendment for the Coachella Valley plan area.

The express purposes of the administrative closures listed above were to provide additional protection to listed species and habitat pending consultation and the signing of a decision document for the Coachella Valley plan amendment. Since the express purposes of the administrative closures have been satisfied with signing of the ROD the temporary closures automatically terminate. Since these closures have terminated by their express terms, this determination is not a decision subject to appeal and review by the IBLA.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Gail Acheson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gail Acheson
Field Manager